



Gift helps citrus students succeed

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A gift tells a story of how the citrus industry is a community as well as a business.

Perseveranca da Delfina Khossa Mongofa will never get to meet Larry Jackson. The Citrus Hall of Famer passed away about a year ago after

a career as a citrus teacher, mentor and Extension specialist. He wrote a book on citrus production.

Mongofa didn't arrive in the United States until early this year. She is reminded daily of Jackson, though, when she passes a plaque bearing



Mongofa

his name as she enters or leaves her bedroom. She is from Mozambique, but currently home is an 8-foot by 10-foot room in the student living quarters at the Citrus Research and Education Center (CREC) in Lake Alfred.

Like so many international students, Mongofa arrived with no vehicle, no bank account and no familiarity with Polk County. It's difficult to find apartment leases for the six-month period that she will study precision agriculture under Arnold Schumann at CREC.

COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

When Jackson died, his family decided his legacy should be to continue one of the things he did



Jackson

in lieu of flowers, they asked his friends and family to donate to the foundation.

The gift went toward Mongofa's room. She's a two-minute walk from where she works at CREC. She can spend more of her time working and studying, and less on riding a bus or apartment hunting. She's also learning from Jackson that there's community behind the science and that the citrus community takes care of its own.

That's meaningful to Mongofa. She said she hopes her education will prepare her "to do something that involves an entire community so that the benefits are shared among many people."

Putting his name on a student bedroom at CREC allows Jackson's family to honor his memory in a meaningful way. It's a creative way to tie together two of Jackson's passions — extending citrus science to growers and mentoring students. And it tells those at the very beginning of a citrus career that they can expect to find a community of support along the way.

INFLUENCING OTHERS

Jackson didn't set out to change people's lives. But just by sharing his

devotion to citrus science, he did change a few. Jackson wasn't trying to proselytize when he went fishing and camping with a friend named Mark DuBois. When a student of Jackson's pulled out of a trip to Jamaica to study fruit crops, Jackson invited DuBois to fill the spot.

The trip piqued DuBois's interest in agriculture at a time when he was considering a career change. The conversations between DuBois and Jackson became more intentional, not just sharing information about their lives but figuring out how DuBois might navigate the process of pursuing a University of Florida (UF) agricultural graduate degree at the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).

DuBois left his teaching career, got a degree from the UF/IFAS College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and spent decades in grove management. He credits Jackson with opening his eyes to the opportunities in the field. He describes Jackson as a demanding teacher with a knack for condensing large amounts of information into a concise presentation that made things accessible for his students.

To DuBois, Jackson's gift to Mongofa and those who follow her is a fitting tribute. Jackson can't take Mongofa fishing or tell her about the opportunity at CREC. So he's contributing to the support that makes it possible to pursue that opportunity.

This bequest from generation to generation is part of what makes a legacy industry like citrus special and enduring. While Florida has nearly 300 crops, only one of them has a research center focused on a single commodity that turned 100 years old last year.

If you'd like to put your name or a loved one's name on a student room or otherwise support the Citrus Research and Education Foundation, please contact Tammy Siegel at tsiegel@ufl.edu or (863) 956-5897. 🍊

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